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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GREENVILLE ZOO ELEPHANT LOSES PORTION OF TUSK

Zoo staff and local and regional medical professionals team up to assess condition and monitor progress

Greenville, S.C. – Greenville Zoo elephant, Lady Bird, a 40-year-old female, is recovering well after losing a large portion of her right tusk last week. The tusk was discovered mid-morning by zoo staff in the elephant's barn before she was let out on exhibit.

During the initial stages of the incident, zoo staff contacted the North Carolina Zoo, Riverbanks Zoo, the Elephant Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) and local veterinarians familiar with the zoo and/or elephants in order to assemble a team of professionals that could assist with a surgical procedure, if necessary. While it is not uncommon for elephants to break off a portion of their tusk in captivity or in the wild, Lady Bird had a large, visible crack in the remaining portion of her tusk that concerned staff.

"If the pulp canal, the vital portion of the tooth that runs down the center of the tusk, is open via the crack, then there is a direct route for bacteria to invade and result in a tooth infection," said Greenville Zoo Director Jeff Bullock.

While being assessed by Dr. Mike Lowder, associate professor in the department of Large Animal Medicine at the University of Georgia and board certified in veterinary dentistry, a second piece of Lady Bird's tusk fell off, allowing a window into the tusk that showed that the cracked tusk did not affect the pulp canal. In order to prevent future infections, zoo keepers will continue to keep the remaining tusk clean by spraying the area with warm water.

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“Lady Bird has been extremely cooperative with zoo keepers,” Bullock said. “She has rejoined Joy on display and has been doing well. We will continue to monitor her progress.”

Elephant’s tusks are actually their second upper incisor and grow continuously throughout their life. About one quarter of the tusk is hidden within the socket. The actual base is hollow and contains the pulp cavity that extends quite far. Fortunately for Lady Bird, the cavity begins to fill in for females with age, which means the pulp cavity was further recessed in Lady Bird than it might have been 10 years ago. The Greenville Zoo will keep Lady Bird’s broken tusk on display for educational purposes in order to promote awareness of the conservation issues surrounding the African elephant.

Lady Bird joined the Greenville Zoo in 2006 from Lion Country Safari in Florida, where she was part of a herd of three female African elephants. In order to accommodate Lady Bird’s arrival, the zoo expanded the elephant exhibit.

About the Greenville Zoo

Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), Greenville Zoo is rated one of the best tourist attractions in South Carolina, attracting over 270,000 people annually. Operated by the City of Greenville, the 14-acre facility features wildlife from around the world including giraffes, monkeys, giant tortoises and elephants. Visitors can also enjoy one of the zoo’s most popular exhibits, the Reptile Building, which is home to a variety of lizards, frogs, turtles and snakes.

The Greenville Zoo is open seven days a week, except on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. The zoo’s hours of operation are from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and the gates close at 5 p.m. For more information about the Greenville Zoo, visit www.greenvillezoo.com or become a fan on Facebook.

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